

# EDUCATION

## SUCCESS FOR EVERY CHILD

Ensuring that every child in Washington is given the opportunity to succeed is perhaps the most important task legislators face. In November, the public made a strong statement by passing two initiatives that will add at least \$700 million to the cost of education, largely to fund increases in teacher salaries and reduce class sizes. The people in our state support public education and believe, like we do, that each and every child must be given the chance to succeed. But it takes more than money. We worked to pass additional legislation to make sure our children receive the best education possible.

## ATTRACTING QUALITY TEACHERS



One of the keys to improving education is to ensure that we attract and retain the best and brightest teachers to our classrooms. That’s why we helped pass legislation to allow retired teachers to return to the classroom without losing pension benefits. As we saw our state’s retired teachers heading to Oregon to teach, we decided it was time for this law to make sure quality teachers for hard-to-fill subject areas, such as math, science and special education, weren’t leaving our state.

We also supported and passed legislation to make it easier for successful professionals with real-world experience to become certified teachers. Our plan also makes it easier for college graduates with degrees in areas other than education and people interested in working with special education or bilingual students to enter the teaching profession.



Rep. Pennington addresses his colleagues during floor debate. Lawmakers moved into makeshift quarters to pass bills in the weeks following the Ash Wednesday earthquake.

Representative  
**Tom Mielke**

Representative  
**John Pennington**

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## 18th District Legislative Report

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Rep.  
**Tom Mielke**



Rep.  
**John Pennington**

# 18th District Legislative Report

*For the people of the 18th Legislative District comprising Cowlitz and southern Lewis and northern Clark counties.*

Dear friends,

The terrible attacks on the United States last month have, unfortunately, brought a new perspective to the challenges that faced our state’s legislators during the 2001 session.

We addressed the significant earthquake damage our state sustained, responded to the effects of a statewide drought and high-cost energy shortage, and worked through three special sessions regarding transportation, agriculture disaster relief and other pressing matters. However, these were small concerns compared to the tragedies that struck our national capital, New York City and rural Pennsylvania. Those who have suffered and our national leaders continue to need our prayers and support.

While the focus of the Legislature remains on things left unfinished, there was a great deal of progress made on issues important to the families of Southwest Washington. This newsletter provides a report on many of the items we accomplished and those that continue to require our attention. As you read it, please remember how privileged we are, as Americans, to have the ability to resolve issues and address our citizens’ needs through self-governance and elected representation.

Our thanks to those of you who have taken the time to communicate with us over the last several months. We’re honored to represent the citizens of the 18th District, and we always welcome your comments and questions.

Sincerely,

Tom Mielke  
State Representative

John Pennington  
State Representative



# FIGHTING FOR TAXPAYERS

## Governor cuts voters out of the tax loop

As of this writing, negotiations on a transportation funding plan have stalled and lawmakers have adjourned for the year while talks continue. The governor and transportation negotiators are working on a multibillion-dollar tax plan to fund highway improvements, ferries and mass transit. The proposed tax increase is the largest in state history – more than \$5 billion over the next ten years.

A variety of tax hikes are on the table, including:

- A gas tax increase of as much as 9 cents per gallon
- An increase of 12 cents per gallon for diesel
- An increase in the sales tax on car purchases
- Increased weight fees for trucks and recreational vehicles.

So far proponents have been unable to come up with a plan that has the votes necessary to pass the Legislature. One of the key sticking points is the insistence of the governor and many Democrat colleagues that the citizens NOT be allowed to vote on this major tax increase. Beginning last fall and as recently as May of this year, the governor said this tax increase should go to the voters. We agreed. But now the governor has changed his mind.

It's unfortunate that we're being forced to hold the governor to his word to give voters the final say. We recognize that there are areas of our state in need of transportation improvements to relieve congestion and keep our economy strong. However, we also recognize that there are families in our state, especially in rural areas, that simply can't afford high taxes. The citizens of the 18th District have made it clear that they want a voice in tax decisions. It's our job, as your representatives, to make sure we protect your voice and ensure that the state does not raise taxes against your will. It is also our job to ask what benefits will be there for our communities as a result of these taxes. Asking citizens across the state to endure the largest tax increase in state history to solve the gridlock in urban areas is a decision we should not take lightly, and we won't do it without your consent.



Rep. Mielke participates in committee hearings in Olympia. A member of four House of Representatives Committees (Agriculture & Ecology; Local Government & Housing, Technology, Telecommunications & Energy; and Transportation), Rep. Mielke continues to call for state government to truly serve the taxpayers with efficient and effective policy.

## CRACKING DOWN ON CRIME - METH

Methamphetamine is that fastest growing drug problem in our state. Part of the reason is that the drug is cheap and easy to make. In fact, most of this toxic drug's ingredients can be purchased over the counter at the local store. Known as "precursor" drugs, ephedrine, pseudoephedrine, or phenylpropanolamine

are common ingredients in some cold medications and fertilizers.

This year the Legislature passed, and the governor signed, a law making it a crime for retailers or pharmacies to sell more than three packages of any product that contains these ingredients to any person in a 24-hour period.

Unfortunately, legislation adding the crime of manufacturing meth to the "Three Strikes" list died in the budget-writing Appropriations Committee. It is clear that this serious crime deserves a serious deterrent, and we were partially successful in the battle this year to strengthen laws to punish those who produce this dangerous drug.

In 1998, there were 349 meth labs in our state. The number of labs reported for the year 2000 reached 1,449. That is a statewide increase of well over 400% in just 3 years.

## BUILDING THE ECONOMY

With a 49-49 tie in the House and Democrats controlling the Senate and governor's office, protecting Washington's economy by preventing the passage of harmful legislation was our most important responsibility as Republicans these past sessions. We believe more jobs will be lost if we do not address stifling government over-regulation.

Among the more pressing concerns are expensive new ergonomics rules proposed by the Department of Labor and Industries, and changes to the Shoreline Management Act (SMA) proposed by the Department of Ecology that may result in the most restrictive and onerous land-use regulations ever passed in the country. We need balance.

We believe state agencies have overstepped their authority by imposing new rules that have the force of law without sufficient input from the people or us – your elected representatives. The ergonomics and shorelines rules are just two examples of onerous rules created by unelected government bureaucrats appointed by Gov. Gary Locke. And they both represent an enormous unfunded mandate on families, local government and small businesses. We will keep fighting for balance and common sense in regulations that threaten to stifle our state's economy.

# Operating budget: A recipe for tax hikes

Earlier this year, all lawmakers seemed to agree that there were tough decisions to be made in crafting the state's operating budget. The collection of tax revenues was slowing due to our cooling economy, health care and energy costs were rising substantially, state employees were demanding higher pay raises, and then we had a drought and an earthquake to deal with.

It was called a "reality budget," the reality being that we simply didn't have the money to meet all the demands. We were going to have to set priorities and make decisions about where to direct our limited resources, just like families must do when planning their household budgets.

But in the end, negotiations failed because some lawmakers chose to ignore the realities we faced, knowing the decisions that we would have to make would be politically unpopular. What we ended up with is a "fantasy budget". It fails to reflect any of the difficult decisions that we agreed *must* be made.

The Democrat-approved budget spends substantially more than we can afford. **Under any foreseeable scenario it will eventually require tax increases, real budget cuts to existing services, or both.**

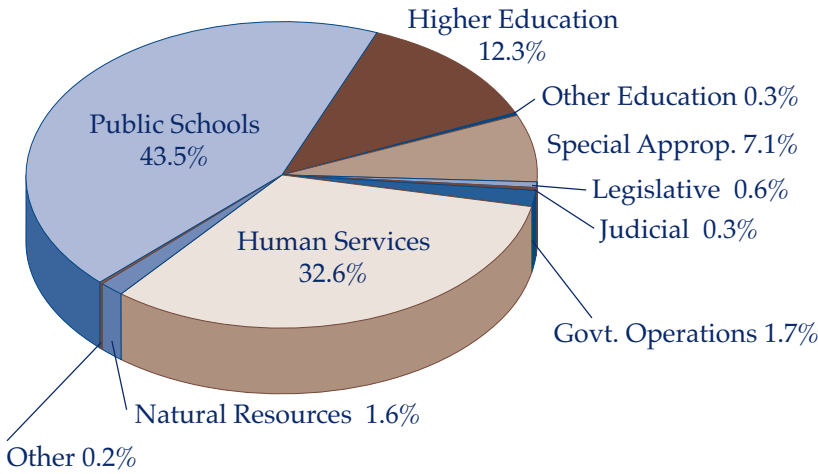
The plan spends \$760 million more than expected revenue, and under very conservative assumptions, the state's general fund will be about \$800 million in the red by the next biennium. This is the key reason we did not support the budget.

In the early 1980s the Legislature engaged in this kind of short-sighted budgeting and ran out of money. Things became so bad that lawmakers imposed a sales tax on our food. Again in the early '90s, the Legislature spent more than it could sustain, and wound up passing the largest tax increase in state history — \$900 million.

This irresponsible budgeting approach does a disservice to the taxpayers, as well as those who truly need government assistance, because it puts important programs in jeopardy. Eventually lawmakers will have to raise taxes or cut programs. With the budget we have, those will be our only choices.

## 2001-03 State Operating Budget

General Fund - State Budget .....	\$22,786,783
Projected revenue .....	\$22,021,800
Difference .....	-\$765 million



## Let us hear from you!

Although we are no longer in session, we are continuing to work on your behalf on various legislative matters. Your priorities are our priorities. If you have any suggestions, comments or questions regarding legislative issues, please call or e-mail us. You may also use the toll-free legislative hotline at 1-800-562-6000.

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